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# Drawing into Knowing: A Natural History

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# Drawing into Knowing: A Natural History

## Abstract

Whether drawing commences in strategic suspension of cognition or from a posture that seeks deeper recognition of the considered object, this research pair share a method of practice that employs the drawn line to trace paths commencing outward from acknowledged deficiencies of information. Both view drawing as tool for exploration; a kind of raw material of thought-made-visible in marks that nibble away at preconception and other barriers to knowledge. The resultant records of such active thinking reveal discoveries to both the artists and a wider audience.

A practice-based drawing project was devised in order to examine these ideas of drawing-as-process. The results of this project form the basis of a conversational presentation. Openness to the evolution within a drawing is a vital criteria for both researchers. Such openness invites detours and digressions that circumvent predetermined outcome. In the gaps between hesitant marks on blank paper - or obfuscating smudges - we chance upon what we do not yet know, what requires us as researchers to step back from preconception and focus anew upon the shifting object/subject. Thus we come to identify new and unexpected possibilities for investigation.

The stages of drawing are evident upon its surface, where layers of error and hesitation collect. The materials themselves also reveal oscillation between the known and the unknown – as when pen bleeds into paper in the pause to look more closely. Such stratified disclosure is less common within written text. Hence drawing transcribes thought and insight of a distinctly different quality than those which occur when writing. The confidence and uncertainty that coexist in drawing allow us to reconsider notions of clarity and assumptions of outcome, particularly when applied to research and communication. Therefore, we situate and engage drawing as its own uniquely generative instrument of enquiry.

## ***Lynn Imperatore***

Lynn Imperatore began to draw before she had time to register any doubt or self-conscious around it. This early ease in mastering a complex faculty was instigated in the combination of short-sightedness with visual disturbances peculiar to the migraine spectrum. Thus drawing presented itself as an essential means of mapping her way through perceptual experience. Lynn is currently involved in practice-led PhD research at UWE/Bristol. Her research focuses on certain interplays between drawing, imagination, and perceptual input from the peripheries of vision. Lynn is co-convenor (with Stephanie Black) of the new HATCH drawing project within PLaCE (Place Location Context and Environment) International Research Centre, and is former Chair of Postgraduate Associates of the Advanced Centre in Drawing (ACiD) at UWE.

Previously, Lynn studied at the School of the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston, Massachusetts, graduated from New York University, and received her Masters of Fine Arts in Visual Art from Vermont College of Fine Arts. She taught university, post-graduate and adult drawing classes for a number of years in the United States, and has exhibited widely in the US and Europe.

## ***Stephanie Black***

Stephanie is an illustrator and researcher, also pursuing a practice-led PhD at the University of the West of England, Bristol where she is an Associate Lecturer. Her research focuses on the relationship between illustrator, illustration and viewer, and this has led her to explore the temporal, affective and spatial qualities of illustration. Stephanie graduated from Glasgow School of Art with a BA (Hons), and UWE, Bristol with an MA, has worked to commission and exhibited nationally and internationally. She has been supported during her PhD by the Arts and Humanities Research Council.

## ***Introduction***

### ***7461 Words***

Image-making begins with interrogating appearances and making marks. Every artist discovers that drawing – when it is an urgent activity – is a two-way process. To draw is not only to measure and put down, it is also to receive. When the intensity of looking reaches a certain

degree, one becomes aware of an equally intense energy coming towards one, through the appearance of whatever one is scrutinizing...The encounter of these two energies, their dialogue, does not have the form of question and answer. It is a ferocious and inarticulated dialogue. To sustain it requires faith. It is like burrowing in the dark, a burrowing under the apparent. (Berger 2005: 77)

As two colleagues conducting their PhD research through and about drawing, we've talked frequently as to how drawing process itself shapes our thinking. Our abstract – and subsequent project and presentation – arose from mutual interest in isolating and comprehending what *actually* happens when we draw. Hence we set up this project for drawing together. Certain questions were featured, while others appeared along the way. Questions such as: what actually takes place when we draw something? What do we learn specifically *because* we are drawing? Why do we both favour drawing as a primary *thinking method* – our informational '*hunting & gathering*' process? What are the similarities in approach and where do we differ? What are the benefits and limits inherent in the material? By doing this, and considering process and outcomes side-by-side, we have sought to broaden our understanding of conversation *about, around and through drawing*. We take inspiration for our criteria from Christopher Frayling's oft-cited essay, 'Research in Art and Design' – where he identified three categorical modes 'as to the kind of research which might suit, indeed grow out of what we actually do' as '(r)esearch *into* art and design...(r)esearch *through* art and design' and '(r)esearch *for* art and design.' (Frayling 1993/94: 5)

We cite other selected sources: thinkers who provide signposts and some relevant terminology that can assist us in explaining and defining what we're doing. For example, the notion of *ideational drawing* of Terry Rosenberg as 'thinking space – not a space in which thought is re-presented but rather a space where thinking is presenced' (Rosenberg 2008: 109) and Maurice Merleau-Ponty's perceptual phenomenology that positions artistic engagement as an embodied activity that instead *precedes* rational preconception, rather than commencing from it ('Eye & Mind'). In his model, the painting or drawing body leans into the world, to receive from perception in a more-or-less direct unpremeditated manner.

We've gone out drawing on location in Bristol where we both live. We've talked *while* we were drawing, then talked *about* the drawing(s) afterward. It is the results of this endeavour which we offer here as open-ended documentation of collaborative exercise – a play in episodes or acts of drawing, our travelogue of an expedition over the course of days. We now stand back and consider what we each drew against the insights we acquired progressively through and throughout the project and process. We survey and review the lessons and criteria that arose and informed us over the course of this project by looking to the drawings, and to where these have led.

## **The Project**

### **Day I: Afternoon at the Museum**

Drawings are episodes characterized by intention, a beginning, a structure, and an end, yet what happens within that structure and between that beginning and end is driven by an open sense of possibility and intuition, one where tactile body and visual imagination coalesce. The drawing event is an occasion; an occasion to remember, to re(con)figure, to imagine, to react, to abreact, to become possessed, to render. It is also an occasion to fail, to aspire and fall short. (Schneekloth 2008: 281)

#### **Lynn [focus: premise meets interest - how we each engage 'looking']**

The fundamental unknown I encounter when drawing is myself. Over a number of years in my studio practice, I've developed a particular habit of working. First I meticulously render and then I deliberately mess up the surface of that observation – disrupting the composition. (Sometimes I overdo it and destroy the work.) It does appear to be a strategy

#### **Steph [focus on methods]**

The museum was an ideal location for a group drawing trip, given the variety of interests served and lack of rain. My previous drawing expeditions to natural history museums have shown them to be suited to study; a contemplative environment for examining the specimens on display, the changing role of taxidermy, methods of display used to engage audiences, and the museums themselves. My activity starts with roaming the cases with a sketchbook and pencil to see what curiosities

driven by affective response. In part, it reflects a drive to get deeper, to get beyond depiction. But there is something else going on as well.

What might that something else in my drawing process be? Well, I've noted (and finally recently acknowledged) the constant presence of a disturbance within my visual field – a kind of static of vision related to migraine aura. So drawing – especially drawing from observation – has always included the necessity of an effort on my part to see past this. The disruption of the drawing surface may be an intuitive impulse to add this other element of sight back in, to make of the drawing something that feels more affectively honest in its expression of what it is for *me* to see.

For our first outing, we met at the *Bristol City Museum and Art Gallery*, and found our way to the rooms with stuffed birds and other animal life displayed in cases. I randomly choose a place, settle into a chair, and start to draw rather arbitrarily from animals – or aspects and parts of these – before me in glass cases. Then I begin to pick out other elements in my visual field; other cases and other contents that I see through to beyond the ones directly opposite. Then there are images reflected on the glass panes that I face; images cast by items in cases which are, in fact, behind me. Those shapes, reflections, distortions all comprise the strata of data that we habitually edit – or edit away – while we are making cognitive and narrative sense of our perceptions.

***Fig.1, 2 & 3 Taxidermy at Bristol Museum.***

As I drew – and only *because* I drew – there came a conscious awareness of these layers in the visual field – awareness of how we look through these to isolate a focus of attention, how we prioritise into perceptual and cognitive hierarchies. In ordinary moments of vision, it is difficult to hold and record the various levels simultaneously. We overlook what we deem insignificant. But these are nevertheless present as visual data – not unlike the constancy of my visual snow. So now I seek to intentionally record and construct from the distortions and layers into and within a single composition as I shift the focus of my eyes back and forth within the singular visual field.

catch my eye and could potentially make interesting drawings. It's a question of awkwardness for me, in both the object and the drawing; does it have enough angles, enough tufts and bizarre details (preferably feet) to make an interesting composition and marks? Is the display un-lifelike enough to pass comment on? Whilst drawing, the information panel next to the specimen becomes important. What details ought to be recorded for my own benefit and also to show to others? This information, and other observations, contribute to the balance of text and image I usually establish within the drawings. If a discrepancy can be created between the two to provoke curiosity in the viewer then I'll exploit it. For example, a label suggesting the specimen was hunted to extinction raises the question of why there is a forlorn, moth-eaten example in a glass case far from home.

Once the day's work is complete and the results surveyed themes start to become apparent. The themes that emerge aren't explicitly set out as aims at the start of the expedition but become clear from the drawings, which act as traces of where my interests lie. This approach places a great deal of faith in practice, and involves a step out into the unknown in the same way that Berger's 'professional secret' does. In this regard, it has more in common with a post-positivistic research position, in that we're not testing theories or treating the world as fixed and unchanging. Our working process echoes Rosenberg's 'ideational drawing', which he describes as: 'where one *thinks with and through* drawing to make discoveries, find new possibilities that give course to ideas and help fashion their eventual form' (Rosenberg 2008: 109). So this is drawing that is generative of ideas, rather than transcribing existing ones. Rosenberg explains that we begin with what-is, and whilst drawing we work with what is known and what is unknown (possibly even what is unknowable). Our drawings begin with what-is in the form of the museum surrounding us, and force us to take detours into the unknown at the same time as revealing shortcomings in what we know.

***Fig.4 Isolated nouns.***

To run this idea alongside our project at a greater distance, the process of discovery occurs both at the time I'm making the drawing and subsequently whilst reviewing the results. Whilst the latter runs contrary to Rosenberg's distinction between 'thinking' and 'thought', the iterative nature of our drawing trips allows me to build on the knowledge and tentative ideas accumulated through previous trips and

The first of these studies were rather awkward and tentative. Still there is benefit in looking back at not particularly successful drawings, in questioning the typical representative criteria for successful drawing. The value of such failures as foundations for later forays into drawing will become apparent in this project/process especially as we return to this same location and subject matter at a later date.

discussions and to bring new 'thinking' to these already held 'thoughts'. This is the balance of 'reflection-in-action' and 'reflection-on-action' of Donald Schon's reflective practitioner as outlined by Gray & Malins (2004:22), who unites the skills of the researcher and practitioner in the research *through* art and design of Frayling's formulation. Through comparing my sketchbook with Lynn's it became apparent that where she has tried to describe the field of vision, my specimens are all isolated from their environment in order to try to draw attention to specific details. The distinction between our approaches is reflected in George Hardie's explanation of what he does as an illustrator: 'I notice things, and I get things noticed' (Nadel, 2005). Here, the concern with communication with others characterises the point where our practices diverge.

Comparison also makes apparent my ingrained tendency to render objects as isolated nouns, for my working method as an illustrator involves using these 'roughs' in the final artwork. Therefore, if I'm using one of these drawings within a new image to communicate an idea it is easier to repurpose it for a new context if it isn't already anchored within a specific place. Using these tentative, exploratory drawings within 'final artwork' helps to retain some of the excitement of seeing something for the first time, or examining it closely to explore the specificities of what you had previously assumed that you knew. These drawings retain the tension of the endeavour, and the mistakes produced by clumsily navigating that terrain between what you know how to do and what you don't yet have the skills or knowledge to describe.

***Fig.5 Bleeding ink.***

One particular example executed in pen on lining paper made this point apparent; there were spots of bleeding ink where my pen had hesitated whilst I was focusing on the objects in front of me rather than the page. These are a record of the times when I ran out of information, just as the tentative line or the redrawn heavily emphasized line show different aspects of this same moment. These don't need to be edited away in an attempt to appear knowledgeable and accomplished. John Vernon Lord's brilliantly honest account of a drawing produced as part of a commission points out that a drawing's deficiencies are part of what makes them interesting, and the clumsiness of these museum drawings gives them a curious dynamic between these smudged or re-drawn mistakes and the more elegant, confident lines.

## Day 2: Grey day at the M Shed

When through the water's thickness I see the tiling at the bottom of a pool, I do not see it *despite* the water and the reflections there; I see it through them and because of them. If there were no distortions, no ripples of sunlight, if it were without this flesh that I saw the geometry of the tiles, then I would cease to see it as it is and where it is... (Merleau-Ponty 1961:182)

### Lynn [focus: selecting subjects – or – subjects selecting us?]

Next we visit another free access public museum in Bristol. *The M Shed* features collections of industrial artifacts. More glass cases here, and again opportunities of transparency and reflection. Items visible through the glass ; other images cast onto the glass from behind my directed gaze. But as there was no place to sit near these, I soon settled onto a comfy sofa in the entry lobby. Physical comfort is a factor when drawing. If not, protests from other parts of the body may derail the communicative flow of eye and hand. Merleau-Ponty understood how we express from within the body as a '*spatiality of situation*' (Merleau-Ponty 1945: 115). Emphasis of activity might shift though parts and function but always remain embodied, contiguous, and contained. '(T)he body schema is dynamic...this term means that my body appears to me as an attitude directed towards a certain existing or possible task'. When, for instance, 'only my hands are stressed...the whole of my body trails behind them like a comet.' (Merleau-Ponty 1945: 114-115)

#### Fig.6 Boat.

Now seated comfortably in the lobby, I face Aardman Animation's model of a pirate ship from their recent animated film: *The Pirates!* From there, this model appears as wonderful mass of flattened shape - displayed against the brightness of the large window to the outside. And so I would not be unduly distracted by kitschy, cartoon-ish details within the model – I removed my eyeglasses for most of the drawing (Fig. 6: Boat). This is a kind of tactic for editing the *body schema*. Editing the conditions of vision itself lessens my ability to literally focus on the distraction of details, as then I just don't see them. Now this strategy based in short-sightedness also underscores – is maybe even the primary reason – why I draw in the first place. It's a drive that is based in

### Steph [focus on discussion and refining methods]

After a brief warm-up drawing several stuffed animals and birds I moved on to the case of old shoes directly adjacent, finding the shapes and wrinkles particularly intriguing. The intense attention I paid to these objects whilst drawing them led me to reflect upon the social history represented by this small and unobtrusive display.

#### Fig.8 Shoes at the M Shed.

Sadly I produced a thoroughly poor collection of drawings, with the pencil too fat and too soft for the scale of the sketchbook. It took until Lynn and I discussed her constantly sharp propelling pencil to work out that this was the cause of the frustratingly clumsy drawings. The tools weren't quite appropriate for the job, but as they were so familiar I didn't think to question them. John Vernon Lord acknowledges that it is difficult to 'climb out of one's own habits', and the comparative and discursive aspect of our drawing trips helps me to identify these sticking points and revise my methods accordingly (Lord, 2005:36).

By pursuing an ongoing process of drawing and discussion we have developed various tentative hypotheses which we can reflect upon on during our next trip's drawings. The occasions when we have returned to the same place have allowed us to review the development of our projects, and the trips to different locations have made clear our interests (or otherwise) in the results we have produced. It's telling that the quick drawings I produced in the M Shed were rather lifeless and dull in the main, for I clearly wasn't persuaded to draw the exhibits or the views over Bristol to the extent that I paid enough attention to make an informed drawing. Instead I relied upon drawing loosely at speed to try and imbue the results with some sort of vigour. It didn't work! This becomes apparent in contrast to my drawings of stuffed birds from the museum, which I have all the time in the world for.

Through comparing my methods to Lynn's the concerns and methods that are specific to me as an illustrator become more apparent, in this regard our discussions reveal what has become embedded knowledge. For example, my

early squinting, in questions about the visual unknown. Questions such as: *What the hell is that? What is it exactly that I'm looking at?* This would seem to differ at least in the texture from the impulse for Steph's interests; her drive to uncover more information about the external selected thing. Yet both of us can resonate in our activity with Sara Schneckloth's sense of drawing as 'episodes characterized by intention, a beginning, a structure, and an end, yet...driven by an open sense of possibility and intuition, one where tactile body and visual imagination coalesce' (Schneckloth 2008:277)

Hence, my drawing of this boat reveals more about shapes made by the light from behind the model than an accurate description of the object itself. It's about what renders this looming complex object into its dark mystery of form. It's details a singularity specific to the particulars of the light and the look in this particular moment in a particular visual field; a singularity translated through and into the drawing. I draw to find out what attracts my eye. Yet I cannot determine what it is that attracts my eye until I allow myself to be led by it into the drawing process - and led to it - by the drawing process. The eye then responds not only to what it finds compelling within the external view, but also to what it finds and marks as interesting inside the field of the page.

***Fig.7 Bristol Vista.***

After lunch we settle at the top of the building, into seats and a panoramic view over the city (Fig.7: Bristol Vista). While drawing here, I realise something that only occurs for me in observational drawing. For a long time my drawing practice has been largely concentrated on representational drawings that describe imaginary views. Now, as I work from direct observation I am freer and looser in transcription from the actuality of the world that sits before my eyes. What I mean is that because it is already out there I don't need to concern myself with the construction of it. Thus I am less ruled by concerns for accuracy or completeness. It doesn't matter if I edit portions out. The drawing of the observed is the imagination in response to external reality, a reality whose existence does not require my

selection of just one item (such as the shoes in fig. 8) that can stand as an analogy for a greater number of ideas was telling, for it betrays my illustrator's training in finding a theme buried within a subject and finding a metaphor to encompass it. Furthermore, the activity itself encouraged me to pursue this analysis of the space by encouraging me to explore the subject in depth. Drawing encouraged me to spend an extended period of time with this exhibit, providing the opportunity for contemplation. As a result, I considered particular aspects of the city's history more deeply than I would have done had I browsed the museum without my sketchbook.

drawing of it. Conversely, when I'm trying to fix the imaginary into representation my aim is to flesh out the elusive, to mimic it into a picture form that is more reality-like, more tangible than the flicker in my mind. I uncover this bit of information about myself drawing only from watching myself in the act of drawing, and then from contemplating the drawing that is the result of such activity.

This city-vista drawing commences and grows from grabbing at shapes here and there; then responding to still others that speak across from somewhere else. Then some marks on the page that were just fun to make, that may or may not be generated from glimpses of sight. It's an activity of dynamic balances – an ever-changing choreography in and out of an equilibrium on the page. It's the play of hand and eye – it's not about *that* vista – but about the wonder that occurred in the looking at it. What do I see and what does it look like for me - rather than what is an actual accurate record of out there.

### **Day 3: Temple Meads Rail Station**

Finding it 'difficult' to draw is perhaps just as important as being possessed with a certain amount of natural talent for it... Sound draughtsmanship can be extremely dull if conventionally wrought. Individuality is as much about the shortcomings in our nature, or weaknesses, as about our strengths. Awkwardness in drawing is as interesting as fluency. (Lord 2005: 30)

#### **Lynn [focus: strategies & failures & finding the 'drawable'?]**

Steph had a successful session here, but it just wasn't happening for me. I couldn't find a comfortable spot to sit, look, or draw. Everything seemed in the wrong position for the reach of observation; either too close or too far to contemplate. A 'goldilocks' kind of outing where nothing was 'just right'. Possibly, this was an affective response to setting. I find rail stations places to move through; places attended with an impatience that is about getting out or getting going onto the next destination as quickly as possible. It is not where I could readily relax into the lingering attentiveness (however quickly deployed) required for drawing. This leads me to acknowledge that even with quick and gestural drawing there needs to be a stopping to look, a pause of attentiveness. The hand can be – maybe should be – in motion during such attentions, but I have

#### **Steph [focus on form/style being appropriate for content]**

##### **Fig.9 Yellow train at Bristol Temple Meads.**

Success might have been down to me packing larger (A3) paper to accommodate my chubby 6B solid graphite pencils. I used household paint sample tubes and washes of acrylic to block in shapes as compositional aids. It helps me to put down unselfconscious marks (made using my entire arm) and these gestures are a nod to the movement within the station. Doing so gave me confidence when tackling a relatively clean sheet of paper... it's a safety net. This trip made the best of my tools in that my bold, unsophisticated scrawls represented an appropriate response to the gleefulness and energy of the place, the sunny day, and a magnificently cheery bright yellow train that pulled up opposite my spot at the end of platform 6.

Plus I had remembered to bring a cushion.

Whilst it seemed frivolous to mention it at the time, the theme of comfort has cropped up in both our accounts of these drawing trips. Rather



to care enough about what my eyes have met to stop and look! If I look over the drawings I attempted that day, they seem to sit disjointed on the page, reflecting my impatient unwillingness to *find and hold* the moment of time, to stop and look. No scene here pulled and slowed my eyes.

#### **Day 4: Hot summer's day at Cabot Circus**

It is not just a physical tension that is conveyed by a gesture...but psychological echoes of emotion. If, as I am suggesting, gestured marks constitute a language of the body, the hope for their interpretation lies beyond the logic of sign, located instead in the resonance of *feeling* bodies – alone and in community. (Schneckloth 2008:280)

#### **Lynn [focus: assumptions, what we didn't 'know' before we drew]**

We meet on a day that is a blessed break from the continual rainstorm of this past summer. We're undecided about where to draw and begin over coffee. Then we head to the city centre's new-ish enclosed shopping mall. I attempt to continue my enquiry into multilayered vision. Thinking this site will prove visually interesting; I begin with storefront windows with their merchandise displays and disclosures, the passing reflections, and the shapes and shadows of this strangely unreal and unnatural architecture. Yet the pleasures of vision are thwarted. I struggle to feign attraction to the mechanized designs of contemporary commerce, to the bland aesthetics of retail chains. Another affective reaction perhaps, as it is just hard to sustain adequate interest for the eyes' efforts of focus and re-focus. So here I find that another requisite for drawing (from observation or otherwise) is a genuine curiosity that is fed and satisfied through the process of drawing. I have to care enough in order to look, to want to know more, to want to invest my perceptual energy and attention.

Yet at the same time, this hot summer afternoon brings people into the space. They gather, move, sit, wait - often inside designated pausing places built into this designed landscape. (We recognize that there are other, varied another aspects of architectural intentionality to be discerned through drawing.) Now my interest is grabbed and sparked in the

than be interpreted as an attempt to position ourselves as cerebral ocular-centric researchers, we both acknowledge that comfort is an important factor because we are aware that we're sentient, embodied beings, and that our physical condition will manifest itself in the marks we make. In this regard, my looser drawings from Temple Meads have a greater sense of giddiness about them than the stilted, self-conscious pages from the M Shed.

#### **Steph: [focus on criteria, revealing lack of understanding]**

##### **Fig.12 Lamentable first attempt at drawing Cabot Circus.**

My drawings began with lacklustre attempts to make straight lines and perspective look interesting on the page – not a skill of mine, or an interest, and a shortcoming that lingered over the unsatisfactory M-Shed drawings. In comparison, my trip to Temple Meads was saved by my choice of location at the end of a sweeping platform, and the station's ornate details. I'd fooled myself into thinking that the typography surrounding us would make for interesting drawings... but then I remembered that I was thinking of other people's drawings, largely because I'd seen a considerable volume of drawn reportage featuring foreign cityscapes recently.

My eyes fell to the shoppers moving through the space instead, and I found their organic forms more captivating than the hardness of the buildings. These produced more rewarding drawings, in that the trembling lines I used to describe them rapidly whilst they were in motion made descriptions of them in my sketchbook that had a little of their liveness. Getting my description of the people a bit wonky resulted in drawings that are still recognisably people, whereas errors in showing the angles of buildings simply don't make sense as a believable space. They *look* like mistakes in representation rather than an acknowledged characterization of the figure observed. The figure as a dynamic object usually seen in motion seems to accommodate my somewhat flexible approach to scale. Furthermore, once we'd discussed our pitiful progress due to our shared dissatisfaction with drawing architectural forms, we became aware of the way that drawing the

quick free sketching of uncertain and dynamic subjects who are not stopped nor still for very long within this transitory environment. The drawings (Figures 10 & 11: Mall People) come as loose record of animated life, and a pleasurable perceptual contrast to the static container that is the commercial construct of the mall.

**Fig.10 & 11 Mall People.**

figures within the space had enabled us to evaluate the space differently. Neither of us had considered the provision of numerous seating and social areas within the shopping centre prior to drawing the figures utilising them, giving us an insight into the design process of those responsible for the architecture. Drawing revealed our blinkers in this regard, and encouraged a different perspective on the design.

**Fig.13 People in Cabot Circus.**

The figure drawings have a little more of the 'vitality affect' that Sara Schneckloth describes as the visceral charge of a gestural drawing (Schneckloth, 2008:280, with reference to Carrie Noland). This is the life in the 'rough' that I try to preserve within illustration, which is often ironed out by translating working drawings into final artwork. This isn't to say that only gestural marks can carry this charge (a point made by John Vernon Lord with which I agree) for that would promote contrived posturing. Rather there needs to be some sort of tension within the drawing to give it a dynamic comparable to the loud-quiet-loud of music by the Pixies. Within this project I've found this to arise from the oscillation between focus on the world and focus on the page, by balancing the development of the picture with searching looks at the world outside to bring new information into the drawing. It takes me past my preconceptions and my attempts to manufacture confident elegance in the drawing, and instead encourages me to attend to the object of study rather more carefully than I would if I were making a record of what little I know about it already. John Berger addresses this issue in his essay *Drawn to that moment* (Berger, 2005:65-72) where he argues for the practitioner to remain open to what is in front of them, which may result in a less traditionally 'accomplished' drawing, but one that relates to the object of study more successfully. In this instance, the quivering uncertainty of the marks describing the shoppers in Cabot Circus are of a different kind of interest to me than a carefully-wrought transcription of the solid form of a life model. Their attempt to balance line and volume in their own awkward way is a curious illusion.

### **Day 5: The Museum/Part II**

Drawings are ideas about form and space, about lightness and darkness. They involve the measurement and selection of things, observed or imagined. Drawings have a lot to do with trying to make sense of the world as we know it, and what we have seen, thought or remembered. They are thoughts and proposals turned into vision... They are messages and signs and they end up as themselves with a life of their own. (Lord 2005:30)

**Lynn [focus: prior experience, adding layer of time & freeing the process]**

Back to the *Bristol City Museum and Art Gallery* – the site of our initial outing. Back to the rooms with the glass cases and creatures. The layered shifts in seeing and chronicling are easier for me this time around. There's a freer manner as my vision slides forward and back between the strata of focus; as of my hand marks to compose from the varied omnipresences that inhabit the seeming still single visual field. I catch my own image in the reflections and I start to play with self-portraiture: the self reflected among the hippos, with raccoon, then with bald eagle. The latter two are self-portraits as fauna of (my native) North America.

What I also notice is that it is mentally tiring to maintain the unaccustomed degree of constant cognitive motion in shifting layers of visual attention, in not relaxing for long into the familiar comforts of maintaining a steady attitude and interpretation of gaze. Still the drawing process itself, the marking and making activity of the hand, is looser and surer than on the previous visit. It is just that there is also this kind of vertigo that comes from a continual movement between levels of looking; a strategy that foregoes the usual balanced workings of sight. So in the last drawings of the day I unwind by dropping back a layer or two – just those birds there close-up in the case, maybe some shadows, maybe a bit of reflective form or shapes of distortions made in the glass.

**Fig.14 Self w/Pachyderms.**

**Fig.15 Self w/Raccoon.**

**Fig.16 Bird/Woman.**

**Day 6: The Museum/Part III**

The eye is an instrument that moves itself, a means which invents its own ends; it is that which has been moved by some impact of the world, which it then restores to the visible through the offices of an agile hand. (Merleau-Ponty 1961: 165)

**Lynn [focus: disposition in/of drawing]**

Having determined that the Bristol Museum, with its reflection-rich layering and its ironically presented menagerie, is the most successful and accessible for our drawing research purposes – we return for

**Steph [focus on drawing as commentary]**

We had both identified and refined our projects by this time, having tried different locations and evaluated our output on each occasion.

Therefore I was content to focus directly on the object, in this case specimens that would make drawings with a provocative absurdity to them. This is amplified by the inclusion of text from the display to highlight the lamentable situation the specimen is in, and the question of what we're seeing when we visit these museums. The number of visitors cooing happily over the pretty birds and the cute furry mammals is slightly at odds with the decrepit nature of many of these specimens and the fact that they are quite clearly dead!

**Fig.17 Vulnerable specimen.**

**Fig.18 Threatened specimen.**

I choose to draw the specimens as they are, to accentuate this rather than to pretend that all is well. This is something that Lynn has termed 'subversive accuracy', and represents a shared theme in both of our projects. We're both using drawing to help us to focus intently upon aspects of our subject that could easily be overlooked or that we are discouraged from attending to. In this respect the drawings are a collection of selective views of the objects which reveal and undermine taught notions of 'accuracy' being a benchmark by which drawings can be measured. They take a different perspective on the museum's displays, and this approach reflects my desire to bring that provocation to the attention of others – to encourage reflection and re-evaluation to some extent.

**Steph [focus on dissemination]**

The amusing aspect of these drawings was important in my evaluation of them, given that the overarching role of illustration is to communicate with others and (for me) the most enjoyable way of tackling this is to exploit any

one more session. Returning to a known view allows another layer to be included in the compositions; a layer of time that blends prior insights into the new work. I continue my self-portrait-among-wild-life strategy, and notice a natural impulse to infuse such layered-sight drawing with an intentionality of humour. I put first myself with our common ancestor – the chimpanzee. Then I sit deadpan among hippo and rhino, then beaver, bird, and raccoon. Can that bird appear to sit on my head? I wonder too if a loosened approach in drawing lends itself to a disposition toward humour (the unexpected) or to other subversions of outlook? Certainly, looseness of eyes and hand requires relaxing the rule of the mind; just has perhaps a slavish devotion to tight accuracy in rendering would seem to tilt mind and thought toward a fixated seriousness. There is something playful in allowing the movement of the eyes to overturn and undermine hierarchies of interest and narration. Through drawing, I can discover and question the differing weights of perception. I can transform *the what* and *the how* of my perceptual knowledge of the world. My eyes and hands engage their thought together, while the narrative text crawl inside my head only catches onto their newly uncovered surprises after the fact!

**Fig.19 Self w/Pachyderms, No. 2.**

**Fig.20 Self w/Beaver.**

**Fig.21 Bird/Woman, No. 2.**

opportunity for silliness. The drawings I choose to show are often the funniest, both in terms of *what* is pictured or written and *how* it is shown. The question of how to show these to the wider world, of what to do with them, hovered over these sessions and informed the subsequent image manipulation I undertook prior to posting them onto my blog.

**Fig.22 Birds of Paradise.**

At this point I return to my earlier argument for retaining some tension with the rough, and use the photocopier, scanner, paint, Photoshop and collage for the 'picture-making' aspect of my work. This allows me to translate the sketchbook drawings into new contexts without having to re-draw them. Whilst doing so I can highlight certain aspects or add in new information to enhance elements that I discovered as I drew, or may have imposed subsequently in the form of a brief that requires a specific emphasis.

**Fig.23 Black-Cowled Oriole 1.**

**Fig.24 Black-Cowled Oriole 2.**

This method enables me to use my sketchbook explorations, replete with erroneous marks and grubby smudges, and these contribute to a richer pictorial surface. It's important to acknowledge that style, or rather visual richness, is important for me. Style is debated quite hotly in illustration, and there are a number of voices (John Berger, again, in *Drawn to that Moment*, and Phil Sawdon's frank exploration of issues that arise whilst drawing in the essay *What Shall I Draw?*) who suggest that style makes the drawing more about the product and the maker than attending to the subject. And if drawing is to be considered as a research method this shifts the focus of the study. To pretend that drawing doesn't have a style – is dispassionate and representational – would be to adopt a positivist position where the researcher is detached. Instead, I argue that the choice of subject matter, how it is framed, every mark made to describe it is in some way a reflection of the maker's values and that these are being propagated by making and circulating such images. Sawdon explores Nicos Hadjinicolaou's assertion that style is 'visual ideology'; it is a barometer of values and desires (Sawdon, 2005:74). I try to acknowledge this as best I can and put it to a purpose, in that by making drawings that aren't overly tidied up they do not pretend to be a nonchalant representation of reality. I try to show that these are drawn from my point of view, which is quite possibly a flawed one.

And with this shift in focus from the practitioner

to the viewer, if I can't entice the viewer to spend at least a little time with the work, then any communicative intention I may have risks being pushed to the side. Which isn't to suggest that the work fails if it is enjoyed for its surface qualities only, rather I'm suggesting that there needs to be a balance of these aspects within illustration. The workplace demands picture-making, and my method of reprocessing sketchbook explorations into more 'complete' graphic images is my attempt to negotiate both that requirement and my desire to fill our visual environment with curious drawings.

## Conclusions

Ideational drawing is a process and always in-process; thinking-in-action and action-as-thinking... The process of drawing is at one and the same time mental and physical. Ideational drawing (as process and as artefact) is a thinking space – not a space in which thought is re-presented but rather a space where thinking is presenced... When drawing is used to ideate it is in the present tense; it is in the immediacy of the thinking act. Thought, on the other hand, is of the past, in a sense concluded... I say 'in a sense concluded' because I acknowledge that even when a drawing expresses an ostensibly conclusive thought, there is an ongoing creation, a continuing emergence of meaning, produced in the way a drawing is taken up by a spectator. (Rosenberg 2008: 109-110)

Again we recall that Christopher Frayling's essay champions 'deeds not words' as research method for the artist-practitioner. One particularly apt area noted by Frayling is 'research *through* art and design' (rather than two other research modes defined as being either *for* or *into* art and design). The side-by-side outcomes and discoveries that arise from this collaboration between two artist-researchers support the unique authority of the *practice-led* mode or method in the visual arts. Drawing, in particular, is well-suited and important as both a research topic and tool. Further, as an important discipline of thought and expression, drawing's benefits can and should be utilized in activities beyond the narrow province of a 'skilled' or 'talented' artist class. In other words, drawing needs to be made broadly accessible. As a tool and mechanism of everyday thought, it should be at the tips of many more fingers.

From having pursued a simple, open-ended drawing project we can identify areas of research that our project relates to, to which we can contribute through wider discussion and more rigorous research. Of particular interest as PhD researchers is the emphasis we have placed on using practice, to take a step into the unknown and trust these methods of activity-reflection-activity, and so on. Here we have allowed 'deeds not words' to generate ideas and to be the method through which to pursue our endeavour. And by starting with the practice as research premise, we bring to the surface many of the assumptions that lie dormant when one engages the practice of drawing but neglects to allow time for reflection. Throughout this project and paper we've sought to make explicit these '*professional secrets*' that Berger writes of. In doing so we've combined Donald Schon's the *reflection-on-action* of the researcher and the *reflection-in-action* of the practitioner that suggest the unique contribution made by the *practitioner-researcher*. By engaging in regular comparative discussion of our work and methods (both during and subsequent to each trip), we integrate the two modes of reflection. What is of note here to researchers is that with the inclusion practical activity – as both Schon and Rosenberg advocate – there is opportunity to expand the range of acceptable possibilities for research. As Rosenberg explains, this is a different relationship to the *what-can-be-known* than that usually accepted within academia. He cites Deleuze to explain that it differs from possessive knowledge (owned by the academic expert) as it is instead 'potentia...knowledge that catalyses a potential to produce again and differently; to produce what is not presently constituted in the course of our history' (Rosenberg 2008: 112-113).

Widening the scope of research in this way also ties into our interests for this particular project. We've examined our methods in the hope that by trying to pin down and articulate some of the decisions that we make whilst producing and editing drawings we may contribute and even broaden discussion as to how drawing can be appreciated and made accessible to those who do not believe they can or should draw. We both use and believe in a set of evaluative criteria that differ from traditional notions of

representational ‘accuracy’ or carefully rendered ‘detail’ as the indicators of interesting drawing. Rather, we’ve moved away from skilful representation towards awkwardness, tension, the unearthing and communicating of subjective opinions, and towards subversiveness. So whilst we have departed from Rosenberg’s ‘ideational drawing’ - in the sense that we’re responding to external stimulus and not specifically the internal imagination of his examples - we still utilise a similar process whereby the drawing activity is used to identify our lack of knowledge, our newly-discovered knowledge, and those things that we’ve sought to investigate yet still failed to describe adequately. Our failures have proved beneficial to the end results, creating areas of interest and a certain friction that are worth preserving in any eventual or truly interesting outcomes.

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